



# *The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

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### **ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS SEEKS DESIGNATION** **OF QUINEBAUG FOREST LEGACY AREA**

*Designation would boost federal dollars, assist conservation efforts*

The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) is proposing to submit an application to the US Forest Service to designate a new Forest Legacy Area in the towns of Monson, Wales, Brimfield, Holland, Sturbridge, and Southbridge.

Designation of the proposed Forest Legacy Area, to be called the Quinebaug Forest Legacy Area, will allow land protection organizations and state agencies to apply for federal funding for the conservation of parcels of forestland within the Forest Legacy Area boundaries. EOEA seeks a Forest Legacy Area designation to make the region eligible for federal conservation funding; there is no regulatory aspect to the program.

"This is a critical step in protecting one of the most significant tracts of forestland in Massachusetts," said Environmental Affairs Secretary Ellen Roy Herzfelder. "Forest Legacy brings federal funds to help conserve forestlands while keeping land in private ownership to contribute to the town tax base."

The US Forest Service administers the Forest Legacy Program and provides funds for the protection of environmentally important privately owned forestlands. Landowner participation in the Forest Legacy Program is voluntary. Within a designated Forest Legacy Area, the Forest Service or its designee (land protection organizations or state agencies) may negotiate with willing sellers to purchase conservation restrictions on forested property.

Conservation restrictions (also known as conservation easements) are legal agreements between a landowner, land trust, or governmental agency that permanently limit the uses of the land to protect its conservation values. Landowners retain ownership and timber rights on the property but confer development rights to the government or land trust. The federal government can fund up to 75% of the cost of conservation restrictions purchased through the Forest Legacy Program.

In 2003, Massachusetts received \$1.68 million in federal funding through the Forest Legacy Program for protecting parcels of land within the Commonwealth's six Forest Legacy Areas. Other Forest Legacy Areas include: Taconic Range, Nashua River Greenway, Stockbridge Yokum Ridge, North Quabbin Corridor, Connecticut Valley and Estabrook Woods.

The forests of southern Worcester county and eastern Hampden county are important ecologically, economically, and recreationally. Tracts of forestland enhance scenic views, provide protection for water supplies, sustain the forest economy, provide wildlife habitat and maintain rural character. EOEa believes that a Quinebaug Forest Legacy Area designation will bring increased options for the conservation of these values.

Dan Donahue, Director of Land Protection for the Norcross Wildlife Foundation, which protects thousands of acres of forest within these towns, called the Forest Legacy Area designation "the beginning of a great step forward in forging a conservation partnership between the federal and state government, local towns and conservation organizations."

EOEA welcomes comments and questions about the proposed designation of the Quinebaug Forest Legacy Area. For more information, including maps of the proposed Forest Legacy Area, please contact Bob O'Connor, Director of Land and Forest Policy, at (617) 626-1170. Written comments may be submitted by June 16, 2003 to Bob O'Connor, Director of Land and Forest Policy, Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, 251 Causeway St., Suite 900, Boston, MA 02114.

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